FWealth International University
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Master's Thesis Defense

Abstract

Death Rituals in the New Diaspora: Funerals in the Lives of Ghanaians in South Florida

by

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This thesis argues that, in the growing body of literature on religious practices of recently emerging African diaspora communities in the West, there is a lack of attention to practices that take place in settings not considered primarily religious, such as life-cycle rituals. Yet, these practices are not only filters for Indigenous African religious beliefs but also furnish for African migrants contexts that perform functions similar to those performed by the formal African diaspora religious institutions in the West. Using ethnography the study investigated the role of death rituals, whether performed in Ghana or in South Florida, in the lives of Ghanaians of the United Ghanaians Association of South Florida as a case study. The findings show that Funerals, which are organized in South Florida for relatives of members, whether the death occurred in Ghana or in South Florida, enable this trans-migrant community to participate in the lives of their relatives in Ghana. Funerals are also settings in which these migrants perform aspects of their culture through music, food, language, dance, and displays of royal traditions, cultivating a shared sense of being together or identity, in the process. The study suggests that to understand the full dynamics of African migrant religious experiences a respectful attention must be paid to the rites of passage that African migrants perform in the West, not only formal religious institutions.

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